

• *The writer has been appealing for ongoing faith*

The writer has been appealing for ongoing faith in the lives of his readers. There is reason for boldness as we go to God to ask for help in living the life of the people of God<sup>1</sup>. Unbelief would be serious rebellion<sup>2</sup>. The readers of the letter have been willing and able to live for God's rewards<sup>3</sup>. Let them stay on course! It would be foolish, dangerous, destructive, to fail to persist in the same kind of faith that they have been showing ever since they came to their first faith<sup>4</sup>.

1 10:19-25

2 10:26-31

3 10:32-34

4 10:35-39

• *Next he shows in detail what this persistent faith might mean*

Now our writer is ready for the next step in which he shows in detail what this persistent faith might mean. The first three verses put before us some preliminary matters. Then he begins to work through the characters of the Old Testament in the order in which they are found in the Old Testament. His point is to show the readers what this persevering faith he has spoken of (just recently in 10:19–39, and even earlier) means in practice.

**First he gives a definition of faith**

1. **First he gives a definition of the kind of faith he has in mind.** <sup>1</sup>*Now faith is the confident assurance about the things we expect to happen; it is a conviction about things that are not seen.* Faith relates to God's word and God's character. It is believing God in such a way that we have a deep and gripping assurance that what God says will happen will indeed happen.

• *Faith is the opposite of sight*

Faith is the opposite of sight. If you see something you are not taking it upon trust when someone else tells you about it. When you believe without seeing, you are exercising faith in the other person's word. **Faith is assurance.** True, it may have battles with doubts. But the very heart of faith is certainty that God is telling us the truth. 'We shall now have a full definition of faith' – said the famous John Calvin – 'if we say that it is a firm and sure knowledge of the divine favour toward us...' <sup>a</sup> Faith is being sure of what God says to us. Both in the general salvation-message of the Scripture and in the particular guiding of the Holy Spirit, the Christian comes to assurance that what God says to him is utterly trustworthy. In the cases of the twenty or so characters mentioned in Hebrews 11:4–31 all of them received some kind of conviction that God was speaking to them or leading them, and that conviction was sufficient for them to rest their life and actions on what God had said to them. Before they had seen any kind of proof of God's reliability they were willing to act in the conviction that what he was saying to them was true.

• *Faith is assurance*

• *Faith is being sure of what God says to us*

• *Illustrated in the lives of the characters mentioned in chapter 11*

**Secondly, he speaks of the power of faith to bring approval**

2. **Secondly, our writer speaks of the power of faith to bring approval.** <sup>2</sup>*For by it the people in the days of old received approval and commendation.* Our writer has in mind the kind of people that he is just about to mention: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses' parents, Moses himself, the people of Israel, Joshua, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, the prophets. In the company of their fellow human beings, all of them faced disapproval at best, murder at worst. Yet all of them received commendation from God. God said in effect 'Well done' to each one of them. They received commendation from God as part of their reward, but what was being rewarded was their

• *Despised but vindicated eventually – first by God then by the community of believers*

**Thirdly, he tells us how faith relates to creation**

• *Our faith in creation displays the very heart of what faith is*

• *There is really only one way we can know about creation. God has to tell us!*

• *God said it; we believe it – in every situation into which he leads us.*

persistent works of faith. Our writer has divine approval in mind, but it may be noted how each of the heroes of faith receive approval from God's people eventually. They were despised in their own time, sometimes even by God's people, but they were vindicated eventually, first by God and then by the entire community of believers.

3. **Thirdly, he tells us how faith relates to creation.** <sup>3</sup>*It is by faith that we understand that the whole world was made by God's command so that what we see was not made out of what was visible.* The phrase 'by faith' occurs about twenty times in this chapter. Mostly it refers to things that people did for God. By faith Abel pioneered the sacrificial system. By faith Enoch demonstrated God's power over death. By faith Noah rescued people from judgement. And so on. Yet it is striking that before the things that people did our writer mentions faith in creation. Why does creation get a mention here? Because our faith in creation displays the very heart of what faith is. No one witnessed creation. The human race came into being as the last of the created items mentioned in the Genesis-account. Man was the last item to be created, so he had no share in making anything. He was not around when the previous items came along. He was also excluded from the privilege of seeing God doing the creating of the previous items of creation. There is really only one way we can know about creation. God has to tell us! And – without having seen anything at all of the creation – we come to believe that creation is a fact. We are simply believing what God says. Nothing is quite so great a demonstration of what faith is as is our faith at this point. And faith goes on being faith in creation! In every situation we believe that by nothing except his own power God can bring about what he says will happen. God said it; we believe it – in every situation into which he leads us. It is the same faith that we have when we believe God has created everything around us.

**Note**

a. J. Calvin, *Institutes* 3:2:7 (translation by Henry Beveridge).



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